elixir of blood and ivory

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elixir of blood and ivory

by finitegray

Summary

Will Graham doesn't *connect.*

But not for lack of a want.

All he wants is to be seen — seen in how *he* sees.

Bare and unforgiving; shadows and all.

beginning

“Graham!” Beverly Katz calls as she darts through the crowd on the platform. Will steps back reflexively before offering a strained smile.

“Hey, Bev. Congrats,” he adds, nodding to the Prefect badge pinned to her chest. She grins and bounces on her heels.

“Thanks! Can you believe Zeller got the other? He must’ve bribed Dumbledore for sure,” she adds with a laugh. Will relaxes slightly as she leads him away from the mass of people to stand behind a pillar. There’s still a few minutes before the train leaves so he needn’t worry too much. “Did you hear?”

“Hear what?” His head tilts to the side, shields dropping as he reaches out with his Gift and — *excitement, apprehension* — “Bev, what is it?”

“Don’t read me!” she playfully reprimands, smacking his upper arm. Will pins her with an unamused look and she sighs. Waves her hand, “Stammets *quit,* and so Dumbledore had to pull in a new hire. I hear he taught at Durmstrang before he moved to England.”

“A new potions teacher?” Will frowns. Stammets hadn’t been *bad,* per say, but he hadn’t been good, either.

Potions was the one course Will had thought he’d enjoy until he’d met the professor. Oh, Will did find a great fascination in mixing potions, but Stammets had been… utterly *dreadful.* Lurking around corners, soft caresses to students that were never *entirely* inappropriate, but certainly bordered it — frankly, Will is rather glad the bloody menace is gone.

But to have a professor come from *Durmstrang?* It’s practically unheard of!

“Mhm! His name is Hannibal Lecter. Rumor has it he’s pretty foxy in his old age.” Bev nudges his side. Will’s eyes narrow. “Come now, Graham! We best be off. I’d sit with you, but, well…” with a gesture to her Prefect badge she’s off, disappearing through the throng and Will sighs as Bev is swallowed up.

She’s been a constant since they first met as first years, always sharing classes and train cars. Though now she’s to be in the Prefect car, with the others. And that leaves *him* with Jimmy Price — a trouble maker to rival the legends that were the Weasley twins.

Will prays he finds an empty car.

—

The train jostles to life beneath his feet and Will hurries the final few steps to the last compartment, eyes firmly locked on his feet when they aren't darting up to study if the passing car is empty or not.

And it *isn't,* sadly enough. He's already pushing through the door before he notices the composed man in dark, gold-trimmed robes. The wizard looks up at him, assessing, curious, and Will's Gift prickles.

"Hello," the man greets, accent clearly European but not British. He folds his book closed and calmly sets it aside, gesturing Will further into the compartment. The younger man does so with caution, slow in his movements as he shuts them both in. Takes a seat opposite the foreigner and studies him.

"Hi." Will's eyes drop and focus on the man's attire. His brows raise at the fine sheen of the garments, subtle touches and intricacies that nod toward a wealthy, comfortable background. Apparel such as this is not uncommon, per say, but as Will is a muggle-born from a poor family he feels rather underdressed in comparison. Shabby, as says Freddie Lounds.

"I assume you are in your later years at Hogwarts, then?" The man shifts, but his keen gaze never once wavers from Will, who's own eyes remain firmly on the wizard's shoulder before moving to fix on the window.

"Mhm," Will replies. "Seventh year."

"Marvelous. Hannibal Lecter." The proffered hand is large and warm, the wizard's grip firm when Will takes it. He suppresses a shudder and draws his hand back near immediately. "I am to take up the mantle of teaching potions."

"Hopefully you do better than the bloke that last tried," Will remarks. "He was a few short of being sane. Couldn't even brew Alihotsy Draught correctly." He nearly flinches at his own rudeness, a brazenly sharp tone to take with someone to be his professor, but then—

Then Professor Lecter *laughs.*

A startled, unpracticed sound. One Will knows instinctively is rare and nearly unheard. Low, rumbly, *deep;* the laugh melts down Will's spine, thick and warm, honey and syrup, and *oh,* yes—

Perhaps potions just may be bearable this year.

gift

The first year's sorting passes quickly, though Will doesn't give it or them much attention. This is his seventh year of seeing the sorting hat and, well, it does get a bit old. Sit on the stool, hat placed on your head, *oh, look, it can see your mind,* and voila! Your Hogwarts house is shouted to the room!

Fantastic.

Will has no siblings, no cousins or distant relatives to watch for, and thus finds himself staring at the star-cast ceiling. Better than risking eye contact with the first years. He has nerves of his own enough as it is, he doesn't need to be mirroring *theirs* too. That, and he's not sure he's energized enough to converse with the others yet.

Dumbledore's booming voice rips him from his thoughts and he glances at the headmaster with dull curiosity, the typical greeting until, "—with a new member of staff, Potions Master Hannibal Lecter!"

Professor Lecter rises and gives a slight bow, his graying blond hair swept back from his face. Will holds his breath as dark eyes scan the hall. Sits a bit straighter as Lecter's eyes pass over *him.* Pause.

Linger.

The man is a work of *art;* all sleek lines, sharp cheekbones, a modern sculpture of what it means to be *astonishing.* Exquisite robes (these much nicer than the travel one's he'd worn on the train, Will notes), exquisite features, and *god,* yes, Will absolutely finds his accent to be *exquisite* as well.

Snape had swapped with Stammets for Defense Against the Dark Arts several years prior, and it would seem that, from rumor alone, Stammets hadn't been able to keep up with the job of potions master. Potions was certainly *not* his strong suit and he had struggled substantially, something the students all knew Snape took considerable delight in.

Bev nudges Will with a laugh, waving toward the food now appearing, and Will nods gratefully. Wool-gathering, his father called it. If Will wasn't sinking into the mind of another, he was lost in his own mind, according to Beau Graham. Typical of an American, though Will couldn't say much.

He's half American after all.

"How was your summer? Mine was *fantastic,"* Jimmy slides over after a few minutes of quiet eating (though not on his part, the wanker), snagging a dinner roll and flashing a smile. Brian rolls his eyes.

Will wonders when the two will admit to their mutual crushing on one another.

“Yes, Price, we know. You got to see the Weird Sisters in person. My summer was dull. Got to visit my uncle in Germany.” Brian waves off the conversation.

“I got to go to Paris!” Beverly butts in and Will cracks a lopsided smile, her joy as contagious as it’s always been. “It was lovely, — *oh,* we should all go for Christmas break!” Brian and Jimmy share a look before glancing simultaneously to Will. His smile falls. Bev reddens, amending, “My family owns a villa there, it wouldn’t cost a thing!”

Benevolence. Charity. *Pity.*

Her lies dribble over his skin, curdling like sour milk, and Will sighs, pushing his plate away (not that he’d eaten much). Bev knows how little he tolerates *pity,* and yet…

And yet.

“I’ll be off to the dorms,” he says, one of the first students to rise. It’s barely dusk; he avoids the sympathy and regret rolling off the trio and steps off the bench. Casts his eyes down, “Do try not to do anything stupid, Zeller, Price.”

—

He lied.

Will slips onto the grounds instead. The quiet is welcome, a balm to his frayed nerves after being pressed in on all sides by so many *emotions.* A roaring swell of them, berating his Gift, and Beverley’s untruths had been the tipping point.

And isn’t that quaint?

His best friend, the one person in the world who knows of his Gift and doesn’t begrudge him for it, is the person who deals the final blow. More often than not, if he’s being truthful about it.

Will doesn’t *want* to be truthful about it.

Wandering down past Hagrid’s hut, he slips into the Forbidden Forest. The instant glacial silence greets him like an old friend. He pays no mind to the path, traipsing off toward a clearing he found in his first year.

It’d been a mistake, really. So soon after arriving to have a mysterious place forbidden? What else was an eleven year old boy to do but to sneak out after dark and roam? They certainly could have better thought that through.

Will Graham was eleven the first time he saw a thestral.

He’d been seven when he’d first seen *death.*

Will has always been one who held a certain fondness for animals. Coming across a skeletal, bat-like horse with abyss-deep eyes and great leathery wings, well… he was entranced.

Perhaps more than he should have been, given what it takes to *see* a thestral.

It was in that first year at Hogwarts that he managed to befriend the entire flock. By his second year he was bringing them food regularly, little meaty treats (though being careful not to overfeed) and tidbits.

By his third year he had gained trust enough to *ride* them.

Now Will finds himself alone in the clearing, eyes focused unseeingly on the cloud-muted crescent of the moon.

The fascination with the new and attractive professor has worn off, a frosty abandoned sense of dread in its wake.

The other teachers know him by now. Know his quirks, his habits. And at the very least *suspect* the presence of his Gift.

And now to have to face a new teacher? Unfamiliar with just how peculiar Will Graham is? A would-be Slytherin in blue and gold robes — the *unworthy Death Eater Mudblood* the shadows call in his wake. A *freak.* A snake in eagle's robes.

One Lecter will see quite clearly, soon enough.

He isn't sure what disturbs him more — a teacher who doesn't yet know of his proclivities or the fact that said teacher seems to like him now, before learning just what it is that Will is capable of.

—

"I may be unaccustomed to the rules, Mr. Graham, but I do believe I've found you *out of bounds,* so to speak," Professor Lecter comments as Will slips back into the castle. He doesn't jump, but it's a near thing. Turns to face the elder wizard with his face carefully blank.

He's standing just in the cusp of the shadows, his visage all the more striking in the uneven light. Will wonders for a moment if it was a chosen move, to shroud himself half in darkness, to force Will to squint to make out his features.

The moment passes with the realization that the professor absolutely chose to do that. Anything to keep the subtle power play, keep him one step above Will.

Waiting.

“Spying on the students already? Are you that eager to slip into Stammets shoes?” Will shoots back after the split second it takes him to process the scene. Lecter pins him with an admonishing stare.

“I’ll give you clemency this once, as it’s the start of term and I understand you are unfamiliar with my rules, Mr. Graham, but do know this: *I do not tolerate the rude.”* A snowflake could not melt on Professor Lecter’s tongue, as frosty as his tone has become. It’s a stark difference from before, in the car. Easy conversation and warmth have broken apart to reveal the stone-cold sternness beneath.

And Will, in spite of everything, finds himself *intrigued.*

A man who does not tolerate the rude has willingly taken a position to teach children and teenagers?

Curious.

“I apologize, professor,” Will drawls, allowing his polished British accent (a falsity, if he’s being honest) to give way to hints of the Southern American. A twist he’d worked so hard to rid himself of after his father had moved them to England when he was fifteen. His first year at Hogwarts had been a nightmare with that ‘ *crude American twang.’* Coming in as a fifth year, having a late sorting, and being *American* on top of it all… he’d been a laughingstock. So he’d learned, quickly, the accent of those around them. And Will always has been a good mimic.

Roughly three years of faking a British accent and yet his Southern comes back as heavy as ever the moment he allows it.

It is satisfying, though, the flash of surprise and singular blink he wins from the potions master. He suspects Lecter is as well crafted as any portrait: layers of consideration and prose to paint the perfect individual. The minor fissure in his cultivated armor coils a low thread of satisfaction in Will. Shows in the small smirk he allows himself, eyes going half-lidded as he stares at the man before him.

“Goodnight, Professor Lecter.”

—

Dark. Quiet, but in the manner a forest goes silent when a predator appears.

The silence has similar meaning here, too.

An obscured figure with antlers, painted in shades of bruising, eyes pure white, edges into Will’s view. Tilts its head curiously and studies him with a calculation not unlike one studying fine art. Will swallows once.

It steps closer. Reaches out, touches his forehead, shares — *violence, hands, stained blood, savagery, headless torsos, biting, carved open bodies, full bodied wine and freshly sliced meat—*

"Pay attention," it murmurs, its voice a warped, silvery thing. Then it leans forward and *consumes* him.

Will jolts upwards, breathing hard. He doesn't have to look down to know he's drenched in sweat. His hair is near-matted to his head with it. He forces out a harsh breath, thankful he'd thought to cast a silencing charm on the bed before sleeping.

No need to wake the others in his dormitory. Pulling the heavy curtains back, he slips out of his bed, padding barefoot from the room. Down the staircase and into the common room he goes, settling on the floor in front of the fire. It's dimmed, idly burning, but he finds comfort in the small flame.

His heart is still racing.

Pay attention.

Dreams had always been a give or take for Will. The shields he places upon himself in his daily routine dissolve when he sleeps. His Gift has always been stronger when his subconscious mind is fully opened to the world.

He calls them night terrors though he knows that isn't true. His dreams are not *dreams,* not in the usual sense. Nor are they prophecies or visions — Will simply *sees.*

A hurricane, his father once called him. Wrecking havoc wherever he goes.

Not an unfit title, because in the beginning, Will hadn't known not to share what he saw.

The first time had been a fractured thing, his Gift not yet strong, but he'd been able to tell his father, little as though he'd been. Beau Graham had blanched when his four year old son told him clearly that little Mikey that lived down the block, fourteen at the time, was being touched in his no-no places by his uncle. He'd seen when his teacher had beaten other students despite how careful she'd been.

He's seen a neighbor plot murder. Seen his friend contemplate drugging someone.

And now he's seen… a murderer?

—biting, carved open bodies, full bodied wine and fresh meat—

No. Not just a murderer.

A clever, calculating psychopath who eats their prey. A *cannibal.*

There is a homicidal cannibal at Hogwarts.

—

Morning comes with Beverly lightly ruffling his hair. It'd seem he'd fallen asleep in front of the fire.

A usual thing for Will, but he doesn't much like the ache it leaves.

"Nightmares?" she asks softly. A singular nod is all Will grants her as he makes his way back up to the dorm to get dressed. He has no intention of sharing his findings.

Will Graham has a Gift.

One his father had warned him from sharing, time and time again.

One he'd never told anyone just how far it went, how much he sees.

One that means Will Graham has never connected to another person because each person is the equivalent of walking through Las Vegas — a guaranteed sensory overload. Normal people don't know how to mask their emotions. They don't have iron-clad control, they spill out of their person suits and spill *into* Will. It makes it hard for him to know where they end and he begins.

So no, Will never connects to people. He has 'friends'; those who he doesn't mind their company in small doses. He tolerates some of the students in his year. Tolerates his professors, the shop owners in Hogsmeade, but Will Graham doesn't *connect.*

But not for lack of a want.

All he wants is to be seen — seen in how *he* sees.

Bare and unforgiving; shadows and all.

And now…

A psychopath. High intelligence. Lack of remorse and shame. Cunning, manipulative. *Controlled.*

Someone who calculates their very existence. Crafts each detail to impeccable, unquestionable quality until there is little doubt in how human they appear.

But they *aren't.* They are so much more.

Will thinks about what he'd decided, a year ago.

No mentions of his Gift in the no-maj muggle world.

No mentions in the magical one, either.

He is alone in his abilities.

Years of spells. Of potions and charms to try and curb his Gift, to give him some relief.

Nothing ever worked.

So he'd changed tactics. Instead of looking to curb his Gift, he'd started looking on how to ease it back. Draw its focus, *narrow* it.

He learned (horribly) that he can focus it upon a singular person.

Will also learned that doing so will drive him out of his head. Walking close to someone causes them to spill into him, but focusing on a single person? Their minds blend so far Will fractures.

It's a burning, vivid pain he'd only attempted once.

Once and never again.

But…

A psychopath.

High intelligence. Lack of remorse and shame. Cunning, manipulative.

Controlled.

Someone who calculates their very existence. Crafts each detail to impeccable, unquestionable quality until there is little doubt in how human they appear.

But they *aren't.* They are so much more.

Morally, Will should hunt down the psychopath. Turn them in to the aurors, get them properly taken care of.

Morally.

Will's morality has always been a little more in shades of gray than most.

He *does* want to catch them, the killer at Hogwarts. The psychopath with the clever mind and iron-clad control. The person who eats only the best of their victims. The feral being living so perfectly in their person suit.

Will Graham *does* intend to catch the cannibal.

Just not for the aurors.

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